



## 3CCI gets it wrong

The Third Congress of the Communist International (3CCI), 22 June to 12 July 1921, seems to have had a peculiar flavour to it, if the documents on women from that congress (linked below) are anything to go by.

Whereas the 2CCI of the previous year had shown its awareness of the necessity of democratisation, so as to create a collective “Subject of History” out of the unorganised masses, in 1921 the situation was practically the reverse, at least as far as the women were concerned.

*“The III Congress of the Communist International is firmly opposed to any kind of separate women’s associations in the Parties and trade unions, or special women’s organisations.”*

Instead, women’s “departments” were to be formed within

the communist parties to carry out various prescribed tasks in relation to women, which appeared to consist mainly of telling the women what to do.

It starts with *“educating the broad mass of working women in Communist ideas”*. This sounds like indoctrination (or “inculcation”) more than education.

In these theses on work among women, there is a lot that is more general, for example: *“The working class must adhere firmly and without hesitation to the tactics outlined by the III International.”*

These comrades had become bold on the back of the October Revolution of 1917. They felt entitled, or even duty-bound, to take charge and to send out categorical and detailed orders to the women of the world that must be obeyed strictly and without hesitation.

*“It is in the interests of the working class that women are drawn in to the organised ranks of the proletariat as it fights for Communism.”*

These comrades had no sense of anything else than “fight”, followed by communism. They had no sense of contradiction between their own prescriptive, dictatorial, unashamedly “top-down” hierarchy of power, and the withering away of the state envisaged by Lenin in *The State and Revolution* just four years earlier, meaning un-coerced self-management of and by the masses.

The democratic formation of the collective mass Subject of History was not a problem to the delegates of the 3CCI. They would supply the necessary will-power. If that meant the resurrection of the State, then so be it, they thought.

Thus it came to pass that the 3CCI decreed:

*“...that a special apparatus for conducting work among women is necessary. This apparatus must consist of departments or commissions for work among women, attached to every Party committee at all levels, from the CC of the Party right down to the urban, district or local Party committee. This decision is binding on all Parties in the Communist International.”*

The document is extremely detailed about what these “departments” are supposed to do.

What we have here is a mirror image of the feared bourgeois-feminist domination of the working women, which is the reason why generalised women’s organisations were not approved of and were effectively banned for communists by the 3CCI.

According to all this, the women will be bossed, one way or another: either by the bourgeois feminists, or by the 3CCI’s “departments”. Nothing in these 3CCI documents speaks of free-willing democratic mass organisation of and for women.

It is clear from these texts why and how the women could be left out of the National Democratic Revolutions. A separate study might reveal that the democratic vitality of the soviets as organs of popular power was already waning in the Soviet Union in 1921, and that the independence of trade unions was already under attack (but still being defended by Lenin). The New Economic Policy was coming into being.

Contradictory movements were in action at one and the same time, just as they are today. In South Africa, there are no independent democratic organisations of women, but there are departments; and this applies almost everywhere in Africa.

[Picture: woman canning worker in the USA]

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Women, Principles, Declaration, Resolution, 3CCI, 1921.](#)
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